

WAR ARTISTS

RESOURCE
KIT



WAR ARTISTS RESOURCE KIT

MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

This guide invites students to explore Canadian war art through guided activities. It offers a selection of stories and perspectives that explore art produced (mostly) by Canadian artists who were part of war art programs during the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and the mission in Afghanistan. These activities are best suited to students who have some contextual knowledge of the time periods and conflicts discussed and some knowledge of art. You may want to provide students with background information on conflicts relating to the activities. Students can consult [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) for more information.

The Memory Project and Historica Canada produced this kit with the generous support of the Government of Canada. The Memory Project, a program of Historica Canada, is a volunteer speakers' bureau that arranges for veteran and active members of the Canadian Forces to share their stories of military service at schools and community events across the country. Book a speaker at thememoryproject.com/book-a-speaker. Historica Canada offers programs you can use to explore, learn, and reflect on our history, and what it means to be Canadian. Find us online at HistoricaCanada.ca.



▲ *Women Making Shells* by Henrietta Mabel May, 1919 (CWM 19710261-0389/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY

Certain activities in this resource kit require advanced listening comprehension skills. When viewing the video resources with language learners, consider enabling subtitles or downloading interview transcripts from the Memory Project's website at thememoryproject.com/educational-resources/video/#main-wrap.



Cover image credits: Richard Jack, Canada's first official war artist, ca. 1917 (Canada Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/3361281). (Main Photo)

Private Roy, Canadian Women's Army Corps by Molly Lamb Bobak, 1946 (CWM 19710261-1626/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum). (Left).

Infantry, Near Nijmegen, Holland by Alex Colville, 1946 (CWM 19710261-2079/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum). (Right)

▲ Artist satchel used by Alex Colville (CWM 20000099-001/Canadian War Museum).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The following is a list of bilingual research resources to support educators and students. You may want to seek out supplementary resources.



THE MEMORY PROJECT ARCHIVE

A collection of firsthand accounts and photographs of veterans.



THE CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA

A resource for exploring a wide range of topics in Canadian history. Search for articles by title or keyword.



HERITAGE MINUTES

A collection of bilingual vignettes, each depicting a significant person, event, or story in Canadian history.



THE MEMORY PROJECT VIDEO RESOURCES

Explore our educational videos, including historical videos about Canadian military experiences featuring veterans' testimonies, and firsthand accounts from our speakers.

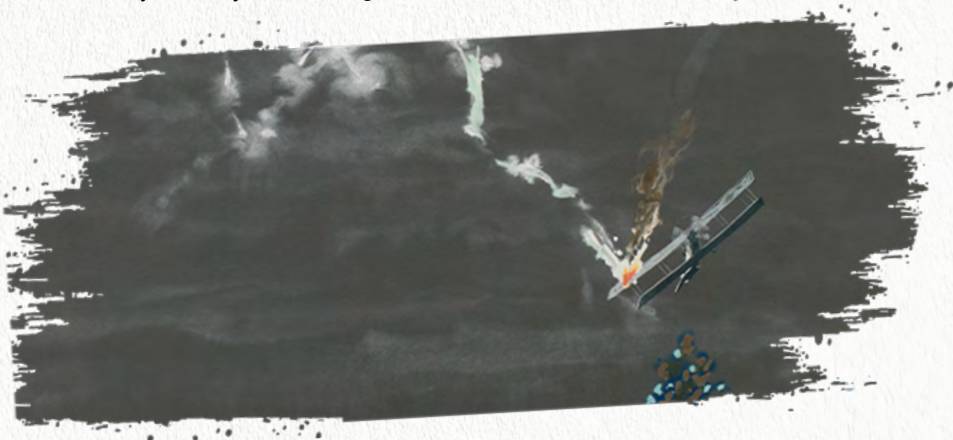


HISTORICAL CANADA EDUCATION

Explore our thematic learning tools for classroom use.

ART CANADA INSTITUTE

Education guides, free books, and other resources for exploring a variety of subjects through art.



▲ *A Tragic Incident While Training at Border - Cadet Caught in Storm - Struck by Lightning* by Francis (Frank) Hans Johnston, 1917-1919 (CWM 19710261-0267/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

◀ *Private Roy, Canadian Women's Army Corps* by Molly Lamb Bobak, 1946 (CWM 19710261-1626/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

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INTRODUCTION: ART IN WAR

Art plays a crucial role in documenting war because it captures emotional, cultural, and human aspects of conflict in ways that traditional historical records cannot. It helps convey the lived experiences of soldiers, civilians, and survivors, highlighting the personal toll of war. Through mediums like painting, photography, poetry, and film, artists can express the raw emotions of fear, loss, anger, and hope. These expressive layers provide a deeper understanding of war that transcends facts and figures.

War art invites audiences to engage with complex and painful topics in personal and reflective ways. By evoking empathy, it fosters a deeper connection with those affected by war and encourages critical thinking about the causes and consequences of conflict.

WAR ARTIST PROGRAMS

Since the First World War, Canada's war art programs have commissioned artists to document and interpret Canada's involvement in military conflicts. These programs have played a significant role in preserving and understanding Canada's military history through visual means. Much of the artwork produced through these programs is preserved in the Canadian War Museum and other national collections, ensuring that these visual narratives continue to educate and inspire.

MARY RITER HAMILTON

Even though she was not officially part of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, Hamilton, with a commission from the Amputation Club of British Columbia (now The War Amps), travelled to Europe after the war to document the devastation she encountered in her own, deeply personal way. Rather than focusing on the action of war itself, Hamilton captured the aftermath – the abandoned trenches, destroyed villages, and the scarred landscapes where battles had taken place. Her work is remarkable for its haunting portrayal of desolation and ruin, with few, if any, human figures. The absence of soldiers in her work serves to emphasize the emptiness and the devastation that war leaves behind. Between 1919 and 1922, Hamilton created some 350 battlefield works. It is the largest collection of Canadian First World War paintings by a single artist. Watch Mary Riter Hamilton's Heritage Minute [here](#).

FIRST WORLD WAR: CANADIAN WAR MEMORIALS FUND

The Canadian war art program during the First World War was a groundbreaking initiative with the goal of documenting the experiences and contributions of Canadian forces during the conflict. It laid the foundation for future Canadian war art programs and resulted in an impressive body of work. It was largely focused on paintings, but also included sculptures, photographs, and prints, many of which remain historically significant today.

Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook) established the Canadian War Memorials Fund (CWMF) in 1916. Beaverbrook, an influential figure in business, media, and politics, was deeply committed to ensuring that Canada's role in the war would be appropriately remembered. He believed in the power of visual art to capture the heroic and human dimensions of the war and preserve it for posterity. His ambition was to create an artistic archive that would serve as a permanent memorial to Canada's contributions on the battlefield.



▲ *The Second Battle of Ypres, 22 April to 25 May 1915* by Richard Jack, 1917 (CWM 19710161-0161/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

Beaverbrook developed a scheme that involved commissioning artists to visit the front lines, as well as other areas of war activity, to depict what they saw. The project was groundbreaking because it invited painters and not just historians, photographers, and filmmakers to witness and record the unvarnished reality of combat, loss, destruction, courage, and resilience.

The Canadian War Memorials Fund produced hundreds of works of art that were displayed after the war. In 1919, the collection was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London and, later, pieces were shown in Canada and internationally. After the war, Beaverbrook transferred most of the artworks to the National Gallery of Canada. In 1971, the gallery transferred them to the Canadian War Museum.

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ACTIVITY: *DISPLAYING AN ARTIST*



▲ *Canadian Artillery in Action* by Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1918 (CWM 19710261-0142/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

PART A

1. Choose an artist from the list below (or choose another artist, approved by your teacher) to focus your research on.

- **A.Y. Jackson**
- **Frederick Varley**
- **Arthur Lismer**
- **Frederick Challenger**
- **Maurice Cullen**
- **Kenneth Keith Forbes**
- **J.W. Beatty (John William Beatty)**
- **Wyndham Lewis**
- **Mary Riter Hamilton**

2. Using *The Canadian Encyclopedia* entry as a starting point, research your chosen artist and their significance. Make sure to include their life, art form and style, culture, and the historical context within which they lived and worked. Consider any barriers they may have faced, and how they responded or adapted to such pressures. Make sure to show what makes this artist unique in their field and why they and their work are significant to Canada's cultural and artistic landscape.

3. Present this research in a visual output such as a collage, poster, digital exhibit, or even a social media outreach campaign. The output should be public-facing and designed for an audience who may never have heard of this person before.

4. Create a written accompaniment to the visuals, including the information you found during your research in step 2. Be sure to convey why this artist is significant.

PART B

1. Compare artist renditions of a similar place or motif. How are they similar? How are they different?

2. Create your own version as if you were a commissioned war artist and came upon a similar scene. Pay attention to composition, colour, medium, etc.

3. Write a museum label for your piece. It should include a title for the piece, your name, the date, the material and medium, and dimensions of the piece as well as a brief description. These pieces can be displayed in the classroom to create a miniature museum exhibit.

4. As you walk through the exhibition of your classmates' war art, what jumps out at you? Write a newspaper review for the piece that stands out the most to you.

FURTHER READING

[Editorial: Canadian Art and the Great War](#)

[Documenting the First World War](#)

[Artistic Legacy of the First World War](#)



◀ Richard Jack
(Canada Dept. of
National Defence/
Library and Archives
Canada/3361281).



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SECOND WORLD WAR: *CANADIAN WAR RECORDS*

5-STEP ACTIVITY: *USING ART AS A PRIMARY SOURCE*

Building on the legacy of the Canadian War Memorials Fund from the First World War, the Canadian War Records program during the Second World War provided a visual record of the war effort, capturing the human, emotional, and operational aspects of the conflict. It was one of the largest and most organized programs of its kind among the Allied nations.

While the First World War program embraced a broader range of media, Canadian War Records focused mostly on traditional painting. Some artists enlisted to take part in the program, and some were hired (ideally with military experience). All artists were given ranks, assigned to various branches of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force), and travelled with them, documenting combat, daily life, and other wartime activities.

The Canadian War Records program resulted in more than 5,000 works of art, almost all of which are now housed in the collection of the Canadian War Museum.

FURTHER READING

[Documenting the Second World War](#)



▲ *Infantry, Near Nijmegen, Holland* by Alex Colville, 1946 (CWM 19710261-2079/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

PART A: THE 5WS

1. Choose a painting or piece of art by one of Canada's official Second World War artists. You can choose from the following list, or select another individual if you desire (make sure to have your teacher approve an outside selection).

[Alex Colville](#)

Charles Fraser Comfort

Jack Nichols

Molly Lamb Bobak

Bruno Bobak

Lawren Harris

Pegi Nicol MacLeod

E.J. Hughes

Orville Fisher

Paul Goranson

Rowley Murphy

George Campbell Tinning

2. Examine the piece. Look closely at the details, and answer the following questions (the 5Ws):

- Who is the artist of this piece?
- When was the piece created?
- Where was the piece created?
- Why was it created?
- Who was the intended audience?
- What event does it depict?

3. Describe what you see in this piece (make a list of your observations).

4. Make inferences: based on these observations, what can you conclude about...

- The artist's perspective?
- The scene and people being depicted?
- The event itself?

PART B: CONTEXT

1. Examine the major event(s) your chosen artist covers in the piece of art you analysed above, and conduct research on that event. Take notes as you research.

2. Write a brief summary of the event, making sure to include details about people, places, and ideas that were involved. Why was this event significant? What larger effects did it have on the war? What was the cause, and what were some consequences (both short and long term)? Why might this event have been important to your artist? What relationship to the event did they have? (E.g., were they there, did they have family there, did they lose a loved one? etc.)

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PART C: EXPLORING

Artists create works based on what they experience. Sometimes this means they depict a straightforward image of a place or event. Sometimes this means taking what they have seen, heard, and felt, and creating an interpretation of that experience from their perspective, whether realistic, stylized, or abstract. Art historians who view their art can use it as a primary source to interpret the past, too. Historians can use artists' observations and interpretations to help them understand what happened in the past, but with the knowledge that these sources are created with intention and bias. We can also compare different artists' interpretations of the same event to better understand how people experienced that event.

1. Look at art by other Second World War artists – if possible, using art that depicts the same event as yours, or something similar. What questions do the images spark for you?
2. What can we learn about the Second World War from these artworks that we could not learn from your chosen artist's work? What perspectives do other artists offer?
3. Return to the 5Ws from Part A. Using that information as well as what you learned in Part B, make observations and use them to answer the questions in the Art and War Worksheet, located at the end of this guide.
4. Make observations about the art using the questions in the chart in the Art and War Worksheet, located at the end of this guide. Leave the "Inferences" section blank for now.



▲ *Camouflaged (sic) Gun Emplacement, Lens Sector* by Maurice Cullen, 1917 (CWM 19980065-003/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).



▲ *Merchant Ship Leaving at Night* by Jack Nichols, 1943 (CWM 19710261-4302/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

PART D: REACHING CONCLUSIONS

1. In pairs, use your notes from the "Observations" column in Part C to develop theories about what we can learn from the depiction of war in your chosen artist's paintings.
2. What theories or conclusions can you reach based on the evidence you have assessed? Use your observations from Part C to guide your interpretation. Fill out the "Inferences" section of the table in the Art and War Worksheet.
3. Based on what you have learned so far, get creative and produce a first-hand account of the scene from an alternative perspective. Your creation should reveal something that we might not have seen from the perspectives we've looked at so far. Decide what format you want your account to take: it could be a journal entry by one of the individuals in the scene, or a sketch that presents an alternative view of the scene depicted. What alternative perspective do you want to portray? Think about who else could have been present. Try to imagine how the person would have envisioned the scene at the time, and try to write or draw a convincing account of their perspective.

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PART E: FINDING PROOF

When examining primary source evidence, it is often helpful to seek out different types of sources. The more sources we can find and analyze, the stronger our conclusions about the event will be. Art can help us examine how people experienced the past, but it is a biased medium – it is created by one person who experienced an event in a particular way. While art can provide us with some information and insight, it is important to compare multiple perspectives to corroborate the information we see.

1. Examining other primary sources that discuss the same event depicted in a piece of art can help us analyse how the artist's interpretation compares to reality. With that in mind, compare the information presented in the art you've examined with a primary source account of the same events, from a completely different person and perspective. You may have to do some research to find this. Try finding a corresponding oral history testimony on the [Memory Project Archive](#), or a document from the Canadian War Museum, National Gallery of Canada, Library and Archives Canada, Veteran's Affairs Canada, or a regional or local museum, for example.
2. Complete the Corroboration and Conflicts Worksheet, located at the end of this guide. What can these sources tell us? What information do these sources not provide?



▲ *Armoured Car* by E.J. Hughes, 1946 (CWM 19710261-3168/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).



▲ *Via Dolorosa, Ortona* by Charles Fraser Comfort, date unknown (CWM 19710261-2308/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

3. Using the information from the charts you completed, consider the following questions in a class discussion:

- How do sources complement or corroborate one another?
- What kinds of conclusions can we only arrive at by considering multiple sources?
- What types of sources do you think might be helpful in filling in gaps in your knowledge and understanding?
- How do multiple sources help us find evidence about the author's perspective?
- Why is it important to compare evidence from different primary sources?
- What does this tell us about bias in primary sources of all kinds?

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POST-1945: CANADIAN ARMED FORCES CIVILIAN ARTISTS PROGRAM

Government programs like those of the First and Second World Wars were revived in subsequent conflicts, though on a smaller scale. The Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program (CAFCAP) commissioned artists to depict Canada's military involvement in later wars and peacekeeping missions between 1968 and 1995. During this period, war art shifted from the large-scale commissions of the earlier programs to smaller, short-term projects. During this period, civilian artists were able to join the program to work with Canadian soldiers on domestic and foreign assignments. Artists could also work independently of CAFCAP.

POST-1945 WAR ARTISTS

Explore the diverse perspectives shared through the art of these war artists:

- [Edward 'Ted' Zuber](#)
- Bev Tosh
- Silvia Pecota
- Robert Hyndman
- Elaine Goble

ACTIVITY: SOLDIER'S SKETCHBOOK (KOREA AND PEACEKEEPING)

Canada's military engagements after 1945 took on different forms. From the Korean War to Peacekeeping missions, Canadian soldiers made meaningful contributions to peace and security around the world.

1. Select a conflict or peacekeeping mission post-1945, and choose an individual's testimony from the [Memory Project Archive](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* who participated in that event.
2. Listen to the testimony, taking notes on the experience and perspective of this person.
3. Imagine that individual had carried a sketchbook with them. What would they have drawn, based on the experience they shared in their testimony? Bring their experience to life by sketching one large image or a series of smaller images based on their description of events and your own research.

ALTERNATE ACTIVITY

Write a diary entry (or letter home) from the perspective of your chosen veteran based on the experiences they share in their testimony and your own research about the battle/regiment/service of which they were part.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

In addition to visual arts and private diary entries or letters, poetry has been an outlet for soldiers to express their shock, process the horrors they've witnessed, and share their joy at the war's end. Write a poem (in a style of your choice) to express what you think the soldier whose testimony you listened to would have felt at that moment. You can look to poets like John McCrae and Suzanne Steele (among others) for inspiration.



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AFGHANISTAN: CANADIAN FORCES ARTISTS PROGRAM

The Department of National Defence established the Canadian Forces Artists Program (CFAP) in 2001 as a successor to the earlier war art programs. It covered the mission in Afghanistan, which spanned from 2001 to 2014.

CFAP provided contemporary artists working in all creative mediums with the opportunity to document Canadian military experiences in combat, peacekeeping, training, and Arctic defence roles. It commissioned several artists to accompany Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. Many others chose to depict Canadian defence activity in the Arctic. Despite the wider scope, with few exceptions, CFAP artists were visual artists.

Unlike the official war artist programs of the First and Second World Wars, neither CAFCAP nor CFAP gave artists a rank or salary. Instead, unless they were already in the military, selected artists were invited to participate as civilians to produce work based on their observations and experiences, and their expenses were paid. Providing a more personal and contemporary interpretation of Canada's military activities was the goal.

FURTHER READING

[Canada and the War in Afghanistan](#)



▲ *Afghanistan #132A* by Allan Harding MacKay, 2002-2007 (CWM 20070177-041/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

ACTIVITY: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Compare art from the First or Second World War with art from Afghanistan.

1. Choose an Afghanistan artist to research:

- Gertrude Kearns
- Allan Harding MacKay
- Karen Bailey
- Scott Waters



▲ *Coalition Soldiers Kandahar Air Base July 2003* by Allan Harding MacKay, 2004 (CWM 20040060-001/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

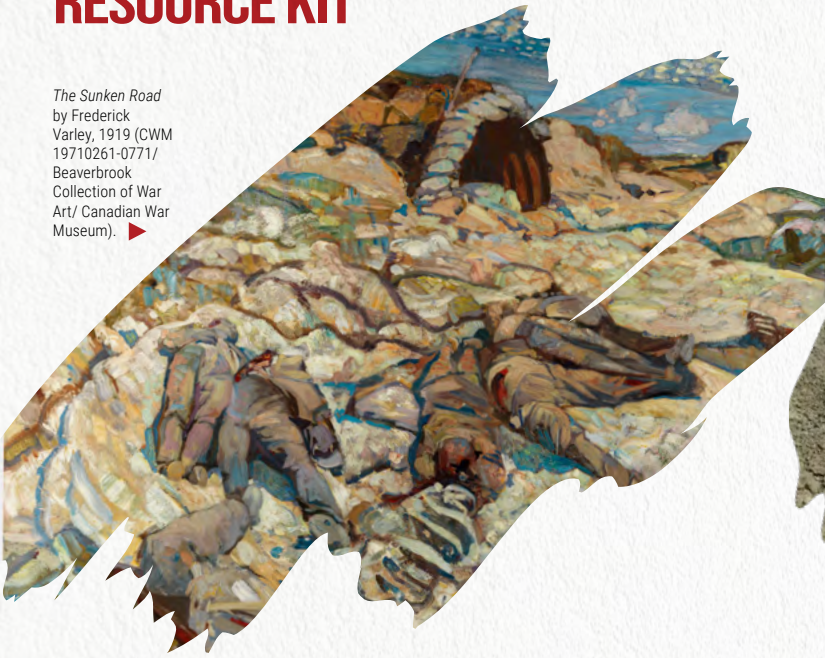
2. Refer back to art you looked at in previous activities, and answer the following questions:

- a. How has the depiction of war changed? How has it stayed the same?
- b. Do you notice a difference in how women portray/process war through art compared to men?
- c. What are some differences and/or similarities between depictions of action vs. rest, or soldiers vs. civilians?



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The Sunken Road
by Frederick
Varley, 1919 (CWM
19710261-0771/
Beaverbrook
Collection of War
Art/ Canadian War
Museum). ▶



▲ *The Battlefield after a Canadian Charge*, photograph by William Ivor Castle, 1916 (CWM 19920044-841/
George Metcalf Archival Collection/Canadian War Museum).

SUMMATIVE ACTIVITY: CURATING AN EXHIBITION

Imagine a museum or an art gallery has asked you to put together an exhibition on Canadian war art. Using online databases to conduct research, curate a 10-piece exhibit showcasing a brief history of Canadian war art.

Databases to explore:

- [Art Gallery of Ontario](#)
- [The Royal Ontario Museum](#)
- [National Gallery of Canada](#)
- [Montreal Museum of Fine Arts](#)
- [McMichael Canadian Art Collection](#)
- [Nova Scotia Archives](#)
- [Hot Docs](#)
- [Library and Archives Canada](#)
- [Canadian Museum of History](#)

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Have students create a gallery in your school, and invite students to walk through the exhibits as if they were visiting a gallery.

1. Begin by planning the focus of your exhibit. Will it cover one conflict, one artist, one geographical area? Will it cover a broad overview of Canadian war art history? You may want to organize your exhibit thematically – around a particular geographical area, a battle, or a motif, for example. Are there any specific communities you want to include? Are there any genres or mediums you don't want to leave out?
2. Once you have a rough idea of what your exhibit will look like, it is time to make your selections. Use *TCE*, online databases, and any other resources provided by your teacher to search for material.
3. After you have made your final selection, write a short paragraph for each piece detailing who the creator is, when the piece originated, where it was created, how it was made (if applicable), why it is significant, and why you have chosen to include it in your exhibition. Make sure that your exhibition is in the order you would like it to be viewed as if you were walking through a gallery.
4. Create a visual representation of your gallery, with images of the artworks and their explanations visible. What order would you like the pieces to be viewed, and why? Choose a title for your exhibit, and write an introduction about the significance of the pieces in your exhibit.

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ART AND WAR *WORKSHEET*

	OBSERVATIONS (EVIDENCE)	INFERENCES (THEORIES)
WHAT DOES THIS PIECE TELL US ABOUT THE EVENT DEPICTED BY THE ARTIST?		
WHAT DOES THIS PIECE TELL US ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF THE ARTIST DURING THE EVENT?		
WHAT MESSAGES MIGHT THE ARTIST BE TRYING TO CONVEY THROUGH THEIR WORK?		
WHAT DOES YOUR CHOSEN PIECE SUGGEST ABOUT THE ARTIST'S THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND VALUES?		

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CORROBORATIONS AND CONFLICTS WORKSHEET

SIMILARITIES/CORROBORATIONS	CHOSEN ARTWORK	OTHER PRIMARY SOURCE
1.		
2.		
3.		
DIFFERENCES/CONFLICTS	CHOSEN ARTWORK	OTHER PRIMARY SOURCE
4.		
5.		

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CORROBORATIONS AND CONFLICTS *WORKSHEET*

	WHAT THIS SOURCE CAN TELL US	WHAT THIS SOURCE CANNOT TELL US
CHOSEN ARTWORK		
OTHER PRIMARY SOURCE		



▲ *Convoy in Bedford Basin* by Arthur Lismer, 1919 (CWM 19710261-0344/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).



Photo captions (Clockwise): *Private Roy, Canadian Women's Army Corps* by Molly Lamb Bobak, 1946 (CWM 19710261-1626/ Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

Cemetery of the 7th Battalion, British Columbia, Canada by Mary Riter Hamilton, 1919 (Library and Archives Canada/Acc. No. 1988-180-70).

Above the Lake; Targets Below by Francis (Frank) Hans Johnston, 1918 (CWM 19710261-0280/ Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/Canadian War Museum).

